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SUBJECT: GVN MAKES EXCUSES FOR APRIL 5 INCIDENT, DISSIDENT FAMILY
MEMBERS OKAY

Ref: HANOI 636

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Summary

1. (SBU) On April 6, a local security official told Poloff that the altercation at the Ambassador's residence on April 5 (reftel) was the result of "local officials acting without orders, to protect the Ambassador." As for the five invitees to the Ambassador's residence, over the weekend we were able to ascertain through direct and indirect contact that they are "okay," although most remain under tight surveillance. We will attempt to meet with them soon. Although the local press covered the overall Codel in generally positive terms, reportage on Congresswoman Sanchez's activities made extensive use of the negative comments of GVN and National Assembly officials. End Summary.

"Local Police Acted Independently"

2. (SBU) On April 6, Poloff was contacted by one of our Ministry of Public Security (MPS) contacts to discuss reftel's incident at the Ambassador's residence on April 5. The contact stated that he was instructed to pass to us an "informal message" from the MPS: 1) that the events at the residence were the result of local police trying to protect the Ambassador, and were not because of any GVN or MPS policy; 2) that the Ambassador had acted "illegally" in speaking to the press about the incident at a press roundtable on April 6 with the Codel's Chairman Ortiz; 3) that the Ambassador's strong comments about the event were "made in ignorance of the situation on the ground since he had only seen what was in front of him;" and, 4) that the MPS would like to establish a better communication link with the Embassy to discuss "dangers" to the Ambassador's and DCM's residences "to prevent such an event in future."

3. (SBU) Poloff replied that the "local officials acting without orders" excuse was thin given the large number of officers present at the residence on April 5 and the MPS's obvious effort to prevent our guests from even leaving their homes. The situation was clearly the result of an MPS and GVN decision to interfere in the meeting, which was unacceptable. Furthermore, the Embassy has a right to schedule press conferences when and as we feel it is appropriate, and the Ambassador will not accept being told when he can or cannot speak to the press, Poloff said.

4. (SBU) After a somewhat heated exchange, the MPS contact agreed that Poloffs should meet with MPS officials as soon as possible to discuss these and other matters, but he would not commit to a time without further instructions from his superiors.

Status of the Invitees

15. (SBU) Since the April 5 incident, Post has reached out to all five of the invited women to determine their welfare and whereabouts. They report the following:

-- Mrs. Vu Thuy Ha (wife of cyber-dissident and former prisoner of concern Pham Hong Son) was one the two women who actually made it to the Ambassador's residence on the evening of April 5. We are in e-mail contact with her. She reports that she is "okay," but access to her home is controlled, and she is followed wherever she goes.

-- Mrs. Bui Kim Ngan (wife of imprisoned journalist Nguyen Vu Binh), who also made it to the Ambassador's residence on April 5, is in a similar situation as Mrs. Ha. Both are in touch with each other and with us and are interested in meeting with us to speak further. We plan to do so shortly without jeopardizing their safety.

-- Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thu Hien (wife of former NED fellow and now jailed attorney Le Quoc Quan) spoke to one of our FSN staff by telephone, and also e-mailed Poloff. She reports that she was called to her local police station for questioning the afternoon of April 5 and was held there until 10 p.m. to prevent her from attending the meeting at the Ambassador's residence. In addition, her home phone was cut off on April 5. She is increasingly worried about the welfare of her husband, whom she has not seen since his arrest on March 8.

-- We were not able to reach Mrs. Vu Minh Khanh (wife of jailed attorney Nguyen Van Dai) or Mrs. Tran Thi Le (mother of jailed attorney Le Thi Cong Nhan) by telephone. However, another of our activist contacts, who is in direct contact with them, told us that they are both "okay." Local police apparently prevented Mrs. Khanh from leaving her home on April 5 and she remains under surveillance. Mrs. Le was interrogated by local police for several hours on April 5 and April 6, at which time she was "threatened" not to speak with

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the media, specifically referring to an apparent BBC News interview request.

In the days ahead, Post will attempt to meet with each woman, should they desire and feel safe enough to do so.

Press Coverage Mixed

16. (SBU) Local press coverage of the incident was split between matter-of-fact reporting about the larger Codel's activities and scathing criticism of Congresswoman Sanchez for "interfering in Vietnam's internal affairs." MFA Spokesman Le Dzung said that Congresswoman Sanchez "has never shown an impartial attitude towards nor genuine interest in boosting Vietnam-U.S. relations." Vice Chairwoman of the National Assembly's Foreign Relations Committee Madam Ton Nu Thi Ninh accused Congresswoman Sanchez of "following an activist agenda, set by an extremist minority of her constituents in California, who are mired in the past."

MARINE